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ABSTRACT

The utilization of students is a valuable resource in providing services for a successful learning experience. Two possible services are tutoring and peer advising. For many students tutoring is the only answer to successful academic coping. Effective tutoring requires knowledgeable, sensitive and well-trained tutors. Depending on the degree of need, tutoring can take place one on one, in groups of five or fewer students, or in workshop and classroom style settings. To insure effectiveness, faculty may certify and help train tutors, make referrals and provide pertinent information and guidance. Peer advising is another possible resource. The peer adviser may assist in handling the tutorial transaction, give individual in-depth orientation to ecial resources on campus, and continue to contact and offer guidance throughout the year. Peer advisers may also serve on task force committees which plan and implement programs such as publicity, student outreach, staff development, public relations and other essential developmental programs. (Author)

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UTILIZATION OF STUDENTS AS PEER COUNSELORS & PEER TUTORS

Paper presented at APGA Convention, Spring, 1978
Washington, D.C. by Dina Maria Sevayega

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Peer Advising Program

The program of peer advising has been develobed in response to the need for a systematic approach to adjustment guidance for students, especially freshmen, returning students and transfer students. The rationale behind the utilization of peers rather than professionals is based on several factors. First, educators and psychologists recognize that peer-delivered information is frequently more readily accepted by young adults than counsel given by parents and professionals. Students often perceive their peers to be more capable of giving realistic advice. Peer advisers "speak the same language and share the same problems" of the students with whom they work. Second, peer advisers provide the opportunity for friendships with upperclass students who can give them accurate information and the benefit of their own experiences in the college environment. Third, peer advisers can reach many more students than a professional counselor, thus providing comprehensive and preventative measures to alleviate problems. Finally, the main thrust of the program is to give advisees a responsibile role in their adjustment while providing the needed aids to facilitate individual growth in all aspects of University life.

The goal of the peer adviser program is to increase the probability of academic and social survival of students who have been identified in need of assistance. For the freshman, there are new academic routines to learn, new study procedures to master, new academic and social values to explore--in short, there is a whole new learning environment to adjust to. The goal of the peer

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advising program is to aid the student in this transition.

The facilitator in this transition is the peer adviser. The peer adviser aids in the adjustment process and fosters independence and self-understanding in fellow students. The peer adviser helps the student to identify personal goals, to examine the necessary components in the achievement of those goals, and to design a program for the acquisition of those components that are lacking. Thus, the student can begin to realistically focus on his needs. The individualized program includes evaluation and utilization of personal assets, available support programs and other possible resources.

The objectives of the peer adviser program can be divided into two sections: coping with academics and coping with socialization.

The objectives for coping with academics are:

1.) To improve the self-direction of each student through development of meaningful and realistic academic goals.

2.) To provide the student with academic survival information.

3.) To recommend support services that can give positive direction towards actualization of personal goals.

4.) To serve as a clearing house for academic information such as course description, professor expectations, syllabi, catalogues, schedules, registration, departmental degree requirements, referral information and new courses and support programs available.

The objectives for coping with socialization are:

1.) To help the student develop a realistic understanding of campus life and peer acceptance.

2.) To facilitate in reducing isolation and increase involvement and interaction.

3.) To help the student develop a sense of self-worth through greater self-awareness of inner resources and to foster independence.

The selection process for peer advisers is crucial to the success of the program. The establishment of a well-informed committee, the planning of publicity, reviewing of applications, scheduling of interviews, and the interviewing itself is extensive and time-consuming. The hard work and long hours serve to enhance the involvement and personal development of committee members. The dedication to being there evening hours, Saturdays and Sundays, and after social evenings of little or no sleep, serve as positive reinforcement to the morale of the peer adviser staff and potential candidates. The job of screening holds enough prestige, excitement and opportunity for interpersonal skills development that peer advisers compete enthusiastically for the experience. The interview is stressful, rigorous and demanding, designed to put the candidate under fire, to probe deeply, and to bring out qualities that the committee feels are basic and essential to the peer adviser work experience.

The qualities in a peer adviser basic to the foundation of a successful model at Miami are generally abstract and therefore judged rather subjectively but evaluated by examination of concrete data whenever possible. Work oriented skills can be developed through training; however, the following quality skills are a necessity from the outset.

The candidate:

1.) Should be self-motivated, responsible, dependable and commited to his job.

2.) Should possess a positive appreciation of the uniqueness of individuals and a willingness to learn from them.

3.) Should be in tune with personal biases that may contribute to rigidity and ineffectiveness in relating to others.

4.) Should possess strong interpersonal skills and a warm and genuine concern for human beings; should be understanding, giving and sensitive, and be able to listen and hear well.

5.) Should be capable of working in groups, one-to-one, independently and without supervision.

6.) Should be able to empathize yet remain in tact.

7.) Should be resourceful, contributing--critical and questioning, but approachable--and should be able to perform in both a rigid and loosely structured working climate.

8.) Should be creative in program development, yet be able to cope with routine trivia, and bureaucratic red tape.

9.) Should feel at ease with peers, supervisers, faculty members and administration at all levels.

10.) Should be able to admit to not knowing everything and ask questions on unknown information.

11.) Should be able to cope with rejection.

12.) Finally, the peer adviser should be able to give enough time to make a positive contribution to the program.

After the final selections of new staff is made, the entire staff, old and new, attend an all-day retreat. The intensive training program is carefully planned by a core of experienced peer advisers and an administrator. Our Developmental Education Office is of the philosophy that training should be an on-going process, since new programs are continually developing to meet current needs and trends. Our basic training-program covers five areas of orientation: 1) university resources, 2) counseling skills development, 3) interracial understanding, 4) day-to-day job responsibilities, and 5) registration information.

The old peer adviser plays an important role in the training of all new peer advising staff. Each new member serves an apprenticeship with an experienced

peer adviser. During the apprenticeship period, the new peer adviser is introduced to each staff member in the program. Through these formal introducations the new members learn office policy and procedures and acquain themselves with the different components of the program and their relationship to the total picture.

The Developmental Education Office allows the peer adviser to make personal contributions to the program through the task force concept. The peer advisers sign up for a task force of their choice and work on specific program components. For the year 1977-78 these included written publicity, public speaking, staff development, and outreach. Task forces are phased in and out, depending on current and pressing demands.

Each peer adviser is evaluated once a semester. The evaluation is fifteen percent assessment of job performance and eighty-five percent discussion of program philosophies, goals and issues and problem areas. The evaluation is long and broad in scope--a necessary process for the establishment of a congenial climate.

Questionnaires are also filled out by those students who have received peer adviser services. The evaluation of such a program is difficult because of its changing nature. If the student is satisfied with services rendered, regardless of the fact that he might have decided to drop out of school, if identified goals have been achieved, we choose to conclude that the program is indeed a success.

Tutorial Programming

Besides the Peer Advising Program, Developmental Education also provides a comprehensive tutorial program designed to assist students with academic deficiencies in meeting Miami University standards.

In an attempt to offer the most possible services to the greatest number of students for the least amount of money, we have divided the tutorial program into two facets--the individual tutorial plan and the group tutorial plan. When a student has a need for tutorial assistance, he comes in to see a peer adviser on duty. Through the discussion process both student and peer adviser are able to focus on the problem and assess the need. If the student has a very weak background and is in danger of failing, individual tutoring is assigned. If a student has a solid passing grade but is interested in bringing up his grade point average, group tutoring is deemed more appropriate.

Individual tutoring may take place within the office or any location on campus. The group tutoring occurs in classrooms, in dorms, or in other available areas. Because the needs of students working in groups change so drastically from one-mid-term exam to another, the tutor or workshop leader must report to the main office regularly so that changes, deletions and additions can be made smoothly. Peer advisers also assist in coordinating group tutoring in the dorms and maintain updated information on the changing need for assistance.

Students who fall under the Ohio Board of Regents ACT cut-off composite score of 20, students on academic probation, and students receiving financial assistance are eligible for free tutoring. Other students pay half of the tutoring costs. Group tutoring consists of three to five students and is free to all.

Presently, a need for tutoring at the graduate level has surfaced. We are working very closely with the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School in an attempt to identify the most appropriate and effective way in handling the academic and economic aspects of this problem.

Students desiring to tutor in their major area fill out an application and get recommendations from their professors and their department chairpersons. They are later screened and trained in teaching techniques with the assistance of the School of Education and interested faculty.

Tutors are required to do a progress report intermittently and services are evaluated upon completion of assignment. For a successful tutoring program, it is important to act as a liaison between faculty and student. Mutual cooperation and communication between the faculty and Developmental Education Office are the main ingredients to a successful academic support program. Input from faculty and students is crucial if Developmental Education is to broaden its horizons and meet future challenges demanded by a new breed of student and an ever changing society. May our mutual resourcefulness and efforts continue to meet the challenges of the 20th century.